

Chet Schink: Oral History of the Portland Section on the 50th Anniversary of the Section

This talk was given by Chet Schink on Tuesday, June 28, 2011, at the NORM 2011 Award Banquet, Red Lion On The River, Jantzen Beach, Portland Oregon.

Because the talk was not recorded during the Banquet, Chet “recreated” the talk; he dictated it Aug 1, 2011 Monday morning and it was transcribed Tuesday August 2, 2011.

[Signed] Martha GK Dibblee, Secretary, Portland Section American Chemical Society

Chet:

Welcome to the 50th Anniversary of the Portland Section of the American Chemical Society.

In the early 1950s, there were approximately 300 chemists in the state of Oregon; members of the American Chemical Society were in the Oregon Section, which encompassed the entire state. Oregon State College, Corvallis Oregon, and University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon, were where the bulk of the chemical professionals were located. In Portland there were very few academic chemists – Reed College had three chemistry professors; Lewis and Clark had two; University of Portland had three; Linfield College in McMinnville had three chemistry professors – but Portland State College and Portland Community College had not even been heard of at that time.

The American Chemical Society meetings were always held in Corvallis or Eugene and once a year a meeting was held in Portland or Salem to placate the members of the northern part of the state. In Portland the chemists were primarily industrial chemists located in numerous small one and two-person laboratories – Publishers Paper in Oregon City had one chemist; Coca-Cola had one; McClosky Varnish had two chemists; Blitz-Weinhard Brewery had one; Charlton Laboratories had two; Krishell Laboratories had one chemist – so they were scattered throughout the area.

In March of 1951 an effort was made to organize these chemists in the various industrial labs, headed up by Harold Zeh, chief chemist at Reynolds Metals in Troutdale Oregon, John Hogl, chemist for Charlton Laboratories, John Burns, chemical salesman for Van Waters and Rogers, Harold Hansen, chemical salesman for General Chemical Co., and Rex Lindsey from Krishell Laboratories. John Burns and Harold Hansen travelled throughout the area calling on these various laboratories so they spread the word about this Portland organization. The first meeting was held March 1951 and the group that organized decided to call themselves Portland Industrial Chemists Association or PICA for short. The meetings were planned to have a social hour and a dinner and then a speaker. The usual custom of the Oregon Section of the American Chemical Society, Corvallis and Eugene, was to just have a speaker and then go home. I recall on occasion of a very special speaker, that six of us from Reed College piled into a family car and drove down Hwy 99E through Oregon City, Canby, Woodburn, Salem, Jefferson, Albany to Corvallis; we'd have supper in some small restaurant in Corvallis, go to the meeting, and then come back home, sometimes driving in rain; it made kind of an arduous evening.

The motive of the Portland Industrial Chemists Association was to establish more of a social contact and awareness of chemists about each other throughout the area. It wasn't long before PICA had over 100 members and each meeting was attended by usually about 60 people. The organization was quite successful and even established a scholarship fund for Portland State College, which was founded about that time, in honor of one of the chemistry professors there, Prof. Clyde Johnson, who died in 1960.

During the late '50s Harold Zeh made frequent trips to the East coast for Reynolds Metals because the Troutdale, Oregon plant was the only operation Reynolds Metals had in the Northwest at the time. On these trips he often would stop in Washington DC and visit with the head office of the American Chemical Society. He started pushing for a break-up of the Oregon Section into two sections – Northern Oregon being from Salem, Oregon north to Portland and southwest Washington and the balance of the state would be known as the Oregon Section.

Finally, in 1960, the National American Chemical Society decided to make this split and form two sections. In 1961 the official papers were forwarded to Portland and several of us met at Fr. Anderson's office at University of Portland to sign the official papers. This was led by Harold Zeh from Reynolds Metals, Storrs Waterman from PennSalt, Keith Claycomb, University of Oregon Medical and Dental School, Fr. Jim, and myself (from Tektronix).

When the Section was formed, one of the first orders of business was that the meetings always would be on the same day of the month so everybody would know that night was blocked out. Secondly, there would be a social hour before dinner, then a speaker, so people would get better acquainted with each other and get to understand each other.

For many years PICA and American Chemical Society (ACS) ran parallel operations. Early on, awarding of scholarships was a priority of the new ACS group and the money was raised from the members to give a \$500 scholarship to an outstanding junior chemistry student at one of the colleges in Northern Oregon or Southwest Washington. It was named the Sherman Shaffer Award in honor of a member of the National American Chemical Society Headquarters who was instrumental in getting the Portland Section started. About 10 yrs ago PICA finally merged into the American Chemical Society group.

There's been a concerted effort by the group from the beginning to recognize the industrial chemists in the area and the chairmanship of the Section has alternated each year between an industrial person and an academic person. This proved quite successful and has held the group together.

Over the years, the scholarships have been expanded; the Sherman Shaffer Award was renamed the "Portland Section Award" and then after the untimely death of Fr. Jim Anderson it was named the Fr. Jim Anderson Award. Funding later was obtained to set up two more scholarships, the Dick Van Santen Award and the Harold Zeh Award. Scholarships now are given for \$2000-\$3000 depending on market conditions, funded totally by the Section. So far the Section has given more than \$158,000 in scholarships.

Some years ago the Oregon Section started the Linus Pauling Medal Award in honor of Linus Pauling, a former Oregon resident, to honor an outstanding chemist in the United States. In later years the Portland Section and the Puget Sound Section joined the Oregon Section in this award and now a day-long symposium featuring the awardee and speakers is held each year at a location in one of the three sections. This has been a successful program.

So Today, we celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Portland Section of the American Chemical Society. It has been eminently successful; we have a large membership (although not many attend the meetings) but the function and goals of the Section have followed the vision of its early founders.

By Dr. Chet [Chester] Schink (Chet d. 11/22/13)

Transcribed by Martha GK Dibblee, Portland Section Secretary, published 8/17/2011